

Michigan Germanic Connections

Exploring Michigan's Germanic family history heritage

Fall 2026
Volume 4, Issue 2

Willkommen

We are working on lining up great programs for the upcoming year. Members will automatically receive Zoom invitations for their use. If non-members would like to attend our virtual meetings they need to email information@miggs.org for an invitation.

IMPORTANT NEWS

The September meeting of the society will be held Monday, September 14th, at 7:30 p.m. (EDT). Dana Ann Palmer will share resources for finding your family in on-line newspapers.

QUESTIONS AND HELP

You can email MIGGS with questions about your German family research. Please use the CONTACT US on the website. We can't do extensive research on your ancestry, but will try to point you in the right direction so you can be successful in your genealogical endeavors. Thank you Ed for monitoring the site for questions!

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT

Guten Tag, Alle!

Thank you for renewing your membership so we can continue to provide such great programs to help you with your Germanic research! It seems like there is always one more thing to look for! Or some interesting word that sends us off on a chase to learn more. Recently at work, I was introduced to a new co-worker, who was from Germany. Naturally, I assumed she was either Lutheran or Catholic in religion. When she said she was Mennonite, I was so surprised! Just goes to show that our assumptions need factual confirmation. Our upcoming programs for this year will certainly help with facts for your research.

Julia

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

German Church Records 2
Events of Interest.....3
Committees.....4
Contact Us 4
Program Announcements.....5
Why German Genealogical Research Can Pay Off 5
Visiting the Emigration Museums in Germany.....6,7
Miscellaneous Genealogical Resources, Archion.....7
Membership Form.....8

ABOUT MIGGS

The purpose of the Michigan Germanic Genealogical Society is:

1. **To promote the study of and interest in the immigration of people of Germanic heritage to America.**
2. **To exchange cultural information relating to the times, life, and society of Germanic immigrants and their descendants.**
3. **To encourage and provide the means for members to share their genealogical findings through meeting and newsletters and to promote the collection and preservation of such materials.**

German Church Records

by Loretta Dunham

Despite my English surname, my ancestry is mostly Germanic. When I first started doing genealogy, I had to drive to an LDS facility, check the listing of records on their computers, order microfilm to be delivered to my local LDS branch, pay a few dollars for shipping, and (the hardest part) wait until the records arrived to go back to the LDS to view them. It was always immensely disappointing to wait a few weeks for the film to come in, only to not find a single relative on a microfilm that took a month to arrive!

Things have changed dramatically in the last several decades. Now we can research on-line (whenever we like) and find records of our ancestors. Many of these records are available for little or no cost.

Thousands of German parish records have been microfilmed by the LDS and are available on their website, FamilySearch.org. Search the catalog for the town or parish where your ancestor attended church. Meyers Gazetteer, which Ed Redmer wrote about in a previous issue, is a great resource for determining the parish for your German ancestor's village. Some parish records have been indexed and can be searched, others can be viewed from home, but some you must go to an LDS facility to view. It depends on the agreement made with the entity that owns the records. Many parishes might still have the film icon, meaning they have not been digitized yet.

Ancestry has been busy adding German records to their collection. They have dozens of databases covering much of Germany for baptism, marriage and death records. If you have Lutheran ancestors from Württemberg, you might get really lucky and find them in the Württemberg, Germany, Family Tables, 1550-1985, which are family group sheets that the ministers assembled from the church records. Mecklenburg census records from 1819-1900 are available and fully searchable. Ancestry can be accessed from home with a membership, but if you are on a budget or just getting started, visit your local library. Many Michigan libraries have access to Ancestry Library Edition for their patrons. FamilySearch Libraries (LDS) also have access to Ancestry, along with many other databases that you would normally have to pay to view.



If you have Catholic ancestors in Germany, Matricula Online should be one of your favorite sites. https://data.matricula-online.eu/en/. Hundreds of Catholic church records have been digitized and made available online for FREE. Check the map or use the "Search for Places" to determine if the parish you need has been digitized.

Deutschland	9100
Österreich	2857
Polen	5
Serbien	5
Luxemburg/Luxembourg	277
Bosnien und Herzegowina	2
Slovenia	660
Italien	106
Privatarchiv	3
Schweiz	136

With over 9000 parishes available, and over a third of these are in Baden-Württemberg, you might get lucky and find the parish where your ancestor was baptized or married. Be sure to check FamilySearch.org also to save yourself some time searching for individual entries. Many of the Catholic records have been indexed on FamilySearch, but are not viewable from home… but you can view them on Matricula!

Archion, while not free, is a great source for Protestant (Lutheran/Reformed) Church records. There is a small fee to use the site; one month's access (non renewing) is around $25. That's much cheaper than flying to Germany or hiring someone to do the research. Sign up for a free account which allows you to search the list of available parishes and what years are covered for each record type to ensure the records you need are available before you pay.

The Archion technical support and forums are also wonderful. I recently found a place name in a record that I was struggling to read, so I posted a link to the image on the forum asking for help determining the name of the place. Within just a few hours, two different people had posted replies with links to maps showing me the location and giving me the various spellings of the place name. The place was so tiny it didn't appear on Meyer's Gazetteer.

There are many resources for German genealogy, check out genealogical society websites, especially the IGGP, for webinars and lectures. https://iggp.org/

German genealogical research used to be quite challenging, but new websites and tools are making tracing your German ancestors much easier and more convenient. I encourage you to jump in and see for yourself.

EVENTS OF INTEREST

1816: The Year Without a Summer & Its Impact on German Migration

The eruption of Mt. Tambora in Indonesia unleashed a volcanic winter that reverberated around the globe, earning the year 1816 the name "The Year Without a Summer." Immense quantities of volcanic ash drastically altered weather patterns and created unseasonably cold temperatures that caused crop failures and food shortages. This crisis prompted many Germans to seek new opportunities abroad, both in the U.S. and in the Russian Empire, which offered both land and religious freedom.

This presentation discusses the intertwined environmental, economic, and social ramifications of the Year Without a Summer, highlighting its pivotal role in the history of German emigration.

Presenter: Carolyn Schott Register at https://gig.eastsidegenealogicalsociety.org/meetings

September 11 @ 12:30 PM Pacific Time | online | English

Tips and Tricks of Deciphering German Handwriting

Learn the top tips and tricks for deciphering the old German script! With expert insight on how to easily recognize certain letters, how to tell tricky letters apart, abbreviations, spelling variations, names, and more, you'll be amazed at what you can read after only an hour of learning!

Presenter: Katherine Schober, German-English genealogy translator, author, and educator.

Register at https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/h1ii4OIERkOTSfcOA2E3Pg#/registration

October 20 @ 7:00 PM Eastern time zone | online | English

Explore Your Germanic Roots at MyHeritage

With billions of records at your disposal, where do you even begin? The MyHeritage Search Engine is a state-of-the-art tool that can help you search for information about your relatives online. In a matter of seconds, it can search across billions of German historical records to pinpoint the ones most relevant to your research. Its advanced algorithms can identify spelling and phonetic variations, understand nicknames, and handle synonyms and ethnic variations. Daniel will show you how to use the MyHeritage Search Engine to find information about your relatives quickly and efficiently.

Presenter: Daniel Horowitz

Register at https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/4797732638928388184

Thursday, October 29 @ 1:00 pm to 2:15 pm Central time | online | English

2027 German Script Course

In this intensive two-week course, June 7 to June 18, 2027, students learn how to read and write German script, allowing them to read German manuscripts from the 17th through the mid-20th centuries. This in-person course takes place on site at the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, PA. Visit the archives' website to learn more.

June 7, 2027 All day

Eastern time zone | in-person | English

Register at https://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/events/#tabs-3

CONTACT US

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Website: miggs.org

Michigan Germanic Genealogical Society

President: Julia Hanneman -Schoenbach

Vice President: Joan Cooper

Secretary: Tim Salatin

Treasurer: Ed Redmer

Director: Rodger Wolf

Director: Loretta Dunham

Director: Brenda Leyndyke

Complete bios are available at our website: https://miggs.org/board-bios/

COMMITTEES

We all wear many hats – the Board of Directors do the following tasks and are looking for volunteers.

Webmaster – Tom Koselka

Zoom Meeting Specialist – Rodger Wolf

Facebook – Shannon Gordon

Twitter/X—(@MichiganGGS): Open

Resource Librarian – Open

Newsletter – Julia Hanneman-Schoenbach & Loretta Dunham

Brochures/Publicity – Brenda Leyndyke

Email list – Ed Redmer & Rodger Wolf

Michigan Genealogical Council Delegates – Brenda Leyndyke and Tim Salatin

Program Coordinator – Joan Cooper

International Germanic Genealogical Partners Representative – Ed Redmer & Loretta Dunham

Contact Us: infomation@miggs.org

If you would like to join our team in any of these capacities, please email information@miggs.org.

WHY JOIN MIGGS?

If you have ancestors in Germanic areas of Europe, joining a society that specializes in Germanic genealogy can be helpful to your research. Joining MIGGS has the following benefits:

- Free 30 minute consultation with a skilled Germanic researcher
- Many of our programs will have nationally recognized speakers
- Quarterly newsletter
- Meetings, workshops, and event notices
- Networking opportunities

All this for the cost of $20 Individual and $30 Household membership. A membership form is on the last page of this newsletter. If you are already a member, thank you!

Do you have any ideas used by other societies you belong to that have been successful in raising membership?

National reports indicate 22-29% of the US population is the descendant of a German immigrant. Come join our society and find out if you have German ancestry.

Affiliations:

INTERNATIONAL GERMAN Genealogy Partnership

Michigan Genealogical Council

2026 PROGRAM ANNOUCEMENTS

The following programs will be presented virtually via Zoom on the second Monday of September, November, March, and May, at 7:30 pm. **Please note that our meetings will be held on Monday nights until further notice.** Members will receive a Zoom invitation. Non-members will need to email information@miggs.org for Zoom information.

Sep 14, 2026: "Extra, Extra, Finding Family Using Newspapers" with Dana Ann Palmer
Newspapers can be a great resource for personal news, announcements, and social items. Learn how to locate newspapers online and find your family. Discussion will include a comparison of some of the most popular online newspaper websites (Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank, Newspaper Archive, Chronicling America, and more). Many tips on how to effectively use these websites will be discussed.

Nov 16, 2026: "Germany's Shifting Maps: What It Means to Your Research" with Katherine Schober
Have you ever wondered how Prussia, Baden, Posen, and other historical regions fit into modern Germany? More importantly, do you know how these shifting borders affect where your ancestors' records are stored—and how to find them once you do?

Katherine Schober's presentation "Germany's Shifting Maps: What It Means For Your Research" will unravel Germany's border changes and show you exactly how they affect your genealogy research. You'll discover:

- Key historical events that shaped Germany's regions and your ancestors' lives
- How shifting boundaries changed record-keeping and where to search today
- A clear, step-by-step strategy to find your German ancestors faster

Don't miss this chance to untangle the confusion and unlock new family history discoveries. Your family tree will thank you!

Why German Genealogical Research Can Pay Off

The Schäfer inheritance case resolved.

An 82-year-old becomes heir to a fortune.

News recently circulated in the press regarding a multi-million-dollar inheritance left by a person named Schäfer in America. As the heirs were unknown in Germany, all individuals bearing the surname Schäfer were asked to come forward and prove any potential kinship.

Now, an investigation led by the head of the genealogy department at the German Institute for Foreign Affairs ("Deutsches Auslandsinstitut") has identified the rightful heir. He is the farmer Johann Peter Christian Schäfer—a cousin of the deceased—who is 82 years old and resides in Bad Nauheim.

According to a statement from the genealogy department, it is now entirely futile for other individuals with the same surname to assert claims to this inheritance.

Schäfer, a fourth-degree relative of the deceased Henriette Garret, has had his identity conclusively verified through church records; furthermore, he had served as godfather to Mrs. Garret's brother—who died childless in 1915—and was able to produce letters written by Mrs. Garret's father, Christoph Schäfer (born in 1808). The fortunate heir served for many years as a city councilor and a member of the Protestant church board in Bad Nauheim. He remains hale and hearty, assisting his relatives with both business and gardening tasks.

Found in the "St. Wendeler Volksblatt", in an issue from October 1936.

Thanks to Roland Geiger for providing a translated copy.

Visiting the Emigration Museums in Germany

by Ed Redmer

In 2007, my wife, Sharon, was invited to judge a couple of dog shows in Wingst, Germany, and asked me to accompany her. Wingst is a village near the Elbe River, centrally located between Hamburg and Bremerhaven. I was particularly interested in visiting the Deutsches Auswandererhaus (German Emigration Center) in Bremerhaven, which had opened in 2005, and Das Auswanderermuseum BallinStadt (The Emigrant Museum BallinCity) in Hamburg, which had just opened earlier that year.

I decided to visit the Deutsches Auswandererhaus first, heading out on our first full day in Germany.

Day 1 – Bremerhaven



(Photo by Jürgen Howaldt, Apr 2006 under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Germany license)

I caught a train from the station behind our hotel to Cuxhaven. As an aside, the station in Wingst consisted simply of a self-serve ticket machine next to the track. At Cuxhaven, I changed trains for Bremerhaven. From the main station, I walked about fifteen minutes to reach the museum on Columbusstrasse, right on the waterfront (there is also a bus service that gets you there in about seven minutes).

Inside are immersive exhibits showing what the emigration experience was like for our ancestors. Included in the permanent collection are recreations of steerage berths from various eras, as well as the dining halls where steerage passengers were fed. After seeing those conditions—where the living space for a family of four or five was roughly the size of a double bed with no bedding supplied—I don't think I'll ever complain about cramped economy airline seats again!

One of my primary motives for visiting was to see if any local archives or tools were available to trace my German ancestors. However, when I visited their family research area, I discovered that the primary research tool was Ancestry.de—basically equivalent to the World Explorer plan on Ancestry. While they do feature collections like the "Bremen Passenger Lists 1920–1939" (which can be accessed online from the United States), visiting the museum specifically for family research turned out to be a bit of a bust. I have since learned that most records related to emigration are held in German state archives and are only available at those locations or online. Still, I would highly recommend a visit if you were in that region of Germany to get an authentic sense of the emigrant journey. Note that the museum was also expanded substantially in 2021.

For more information about the Deutsches Auswandererhaus, visit their website at https://dah-bremerhaven.de/en/.

I made one mistake on my return trip: I dozed off on the train and missed my connection at Cuxhaven. While I managed to catch the next train, I arrived too late for the last connection back to Wingst. Fortunately, a kind young woman who spoke English deduced my predicament and helped me navigate a local bus route back to my hotel. It wasn't the first time the kindness of strangers saved me, but it was a good reminder that embarking on an adventure in a new country while severely jet-lagged is rarely a good idea!

Day 2 - Hamburg

The next day, I set out for BallinStadt. After catching the train heading in the opposite direction from the station behind our hotel, I traveled into Hamburg.



Photo: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BallinStadt_Hamburg_02.jpg

Visiting the Emigration Museums in Germany

by Ed Redmer

Although the BallinStadt is right across the street from the train station stop, I accidentally exited from the far end of the platform across a canal from where I wanted to be. Following a brief, unplanned walking tour of a local public housing area, I retraced my steps and finally found my destination.

BallinStadt (or "Ballin City") was established by the Hamburg America Line as a temporary compound for emigrants waiting for passage to the Americas. It was named after Albert Ballin, the managing director of the shipping line. The three buildings visible today are modern recreations, as most of the original site was dismantled in the early 1930s.

The exhibits offer fascinating insights into the motives for emigration and the hardships endured along the way. I was particularly impressed by the recreation of the arrival hall at Ellis Island; while built on a smaller scale, it faithfully captured what I remembered from visiting the actual Ellis Island in New York.

(Note: The museum exhibits were refreshed a few years ago; signage is primarily in German, but audio tours are available in several languages, including English).

Part of one building was set up with computer terminals, but once again, the only tool offered was Ancestry.de. I spoke to one of the research assistants who confirmed that no additional proprietary records were kept on site. So, once more, my genealogy hopes were dashed!

For more information about Das Auswanderermuseum BallinStadt Hamburg, visit https://ballinstadt.de/. (You may need to use your browser's built-in translation tool to read the site in English).

While I wasn't able to unearth new records on my German ancestors, both museum trips were thoroughly enjoyable and informative—I would gladly do them again!

Miscellaneous Genealogical Resources

Locating German Records: Beyond FamilySearch and Ancestry

In this FREE on-demand webinar, you'll learn how to track down your ancestor's German records – in places besides just FamilySearch and Ancestry!

For the beginner to advanced genealogist alike, you'll walk away with new tools and methods for discovering records, both online and off. This is a German genealogy webinar you won't want to miss!

Register at https://my.demio.com/ref/CYdNfQ2t2H50B31G

Check out more on Katherine Schober's website:

https://germanologyunlocked.com/

From Katherine Schrober's newsletter, Germanology Unlocked:

German Newspaper Site: https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/newspaper

Austrian Newspaper Site: https://anno.onb.ac.at/

Switzerland Newspaper Site: https://www.e-newspaperarchives.ch/

Jewish Newspaper Site: https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/newspapers/jpress

Archion

If you haven't checked out Archion for your Protestant German ancestors, I highly recommend it. Their customer support and help forums are outstanding.

Recently, while checking for a baptism record, I noticed the page numbers jumped, skipping a page (which, of course, contained the entry that I needed) I contacted Archion support and within 24 hours received a response that the missing page was located and was uploaded.

Can't say enough about this awesome research resource!

MICHIGAN GERMANIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY *miggs.org*

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION 2026 – 2027

Online membership application & online payment: miggs.org

Please Print

Last Name:	First Name:	
Mailing Address:		
City:	State:	Zip +4:
Home Phone:	Cell Phone:	
Email Address*:		

*We communicate often by email. We do not share contact information. It will not be published.

Our preferred method of sending meeting announcements is email. May we use email to communicate with you?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Membership Type:

☐ $20.00 Individual ☐ $30.00 Household Membership is for one (1) year, July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027.

☐ New Membership ☐ Renewal

Payment: ☐ Cash ☐ Check Check Number:_____

Make checks payable to: **Michigan Germanic Genealogical Society**

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